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ABSTRACT

This course in reading and study skills developed especially for hospital employees is intended to be taught onsite and to complement a hospital's other training and staff development efforts. It is designed to help adults who want to go back to college to get advanced vocational or technical training. It consists of a list of course goals, outline of assignments, and instructional materials, activities, and exercises on five topics. The topics are as follows: an introduction discussing attitude, goals, and commitment; becoming a better student; reading skills; listening skills and classroom notes; and test-taking skills. (YLB)

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p r e s e n t s

Reading and Study Skills

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Reading and Study Skills

An offering of Step *Ahead:*

A Partnership for Improved Health Care Communication

Sponsored by

The Hospitals of New Mexico
and
The Department of English
New Mexico State University

Reading and Study Skills was developed by **Step *Ahead***: A Partnership for Improved Health Care Communication. **Step *Ahead*** is funded in large part by the U. S. Department of Education as a National Workplace Literacy Demonstration Project. Our other partners include The New Mexico Coalition for Literacy and seventeen hospitals within the State of New Mexico.

As a demonstration project, we are eager to share these materials with others who are engaged in not-for-profit literacy work. If you would like to use our materials, please write for permission to:

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New Mexico State University
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Las Cruces, New Mexico 88003

505-646-3931

We gratefully acknowledge the assistance of our partner organizations and especially wish to thank our many students who told us it really did make a difference.

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Dr. Stephen A. Bernhardt and Dr. Paul R. Meyer, Co-Directors

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Reading and Study Skills
Course Goals

At the end of this course, you will be able to:

- Analyze your attitudes about learning.
- Identify and overcome blocks to learning.
- Improve your reading and listening skills.
- Take effective classroom notes.
- Overcome test anxiety and improve your test-taking ability.
- Feel confident of your ability to become a successful student.

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Points to Remember

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Assignments

Assignment #1

Complete your calendar for next month using either the sample calendar in this book, or bring your own calendar from home.

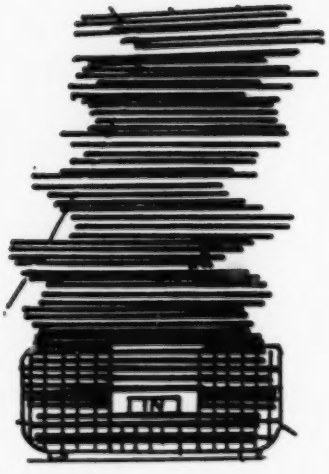
Write a "to do" list for the things you want to get done tomorrow. Bring this to next class and be prepared to discuss how you used the list.

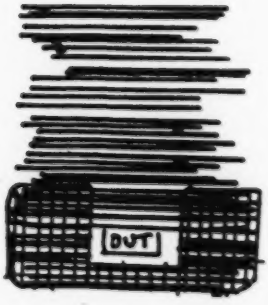
Assignment #2

Read the handout on Body Temperature. Use at least three different active reading techniques to help become a better reader. Bring the marked text back to class and be prepared to demonstrate which of the techniques you used and why.

Assignment #3

Read the handout on the Clinical Laboratory. Use at least three different active reading techniques. Bring the marked text back to class and be prepared to demonstrate which of the techniques you used and why.





Introduction

Reading and Study Skills is a short course designed to help adults who want to go back to college to get advanced vocational or technical training.

If you have been away from school for a while, returning to the classroom may not be easy. By deciding to take *Reading and Study Skills*, you have taken the first step toward increasing your chances for success in the classroom.

Across the nation, more and more adults are returning to school. A recent study indicates that more than 5 million adults are currently enrolled in college degree programs–making up more than 40 percent of the total enrollment in higher education. Growth is also taking place in non-collegiate education, from on-the-job training programs to community-based continuing education courses.

The world is changing fast. Your job is likely to change every few years. Your most valuable skill may well be knowing how to learn and how to adapt to change. *Reading and Study Skills* is designed to help you become a better student, not just for the short time that you are in school, but for your entire life. This course is about discovering what makes learning easier and more fun. It applies to learning anything anywhere anytime.

As you work your way through this course, you will learn how to become a better student; how to improve your listening, reading and note-taking skills; how to overcome test anxiety. Most importantly, you will learn that you *can* learn.

We think that there are four basic keys to success in school:

Attitude and Goals

Commitment

Time Management and Organization

Study Skills

This course is organized around these keys. We think of it as the **ACTS** model. The first day of class focuses on attitude, goals, and commitment. The first class session treats the first three of these keys. Later classes deal with the specific study skills of reading, note-taking, and test-taking.

Attitude and Goals

We've already talked about course goals. In the following sections, we ask you to explore your goals for returning to school and your attitudes about learning.

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Attitudes About Going Back to School

So, you're thinking about going back to school . . . Do you have a million questions, concerns, and fears floating around in your head? Don't panic–your feelings are normal.

Many adults returning to the classroom wonder:

- Can I do it?
- Am I too old?
- What if the material is too hard?
- What will everyone else think of me?
- How will I manage all my other responsibilities?

❒ **What other questions, concerns, or fears do you have about returning to the classroom?**

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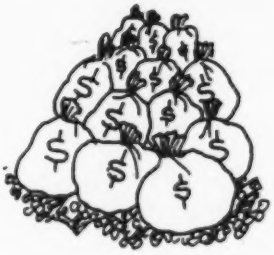
Why Go Back to School?

People have different reasons for furthering their educations. Some do it just for the sake of learning. Others have more practical goals: to qualify for a better job or to enter into a specific profession.

❒ **What are your reasons for going back to school?**



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❒ **What are your goals?**

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❒ **How will school help you achieve your goals?**

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Characteristics of Successful and Unsuccessful Students

Successful Students	Unsuccessful Students
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Being Responsible for Your Own Learning

Many people think of learning as something that is directed by others. You attend a class and accept what the teacher tells you. The instructor organizes the content, tells you what to read and do, and gives you a grade. The concept of learning "how to learn" challenges the attitude that anyone but you is responsible for your learning.

Perhaps the best advice we can give you in this whole course is to

> ***Become responsible for your own learning.***

Becoming responsible for your own learning means:

- setting your own goals
- deciding for yourself what you want to learn, what is important to you, and what is not
- emphasizing learning more than grades
- realizing that what you get out of school is basically what you put into it

Most important skills and knowledge are *learned*, not *taught*. Instructors, at best, present material in a clear, organized fashion. It is up to you to act on that material. You must decide if you're going to listen in class, read the assignments, or do the homework. Suggestions, strategies and techniques in *Reading and Study Skills* can help you become an active learner, but only if you decide to become one.

A number of factors affect learning. Attitudes, learning blocks, survival strategies, and time management skills all play a part in becoming a successful student.

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Attitude: Exploring Attitudes Toward Learning

Your attitude toward schoolwork may be even more important than any reading or study skill. The following questions may help you explore your attitudes about learning.

- Am I committed to the idea of returning to school?
- Am I willing to do the work?
- Am I willing to do the work despite difficulties?
- Am I willing to make the sacrifices that returning to school requires?

❒ **What other questions would you ask yourself about your attitude toward returning to school?**

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Commitment: Overcoming Blocks to Learning

All students, even successful ones, face confusion and difficulties that could undermine their attempts to be successful in school. These problems can become blocks to learning. Successful students overcome these blocks and turn them into personal strengths. In the pages that follow, we discuss four common blocks to learning and how you can transform them to your advantage. The four blocks are:

- Family Attitudes/Family Support
- Time Constraints
- Inability to See the "Big Picture"
- Avoidance Tactics

As you read this section, think about how you can overcome any blocks that apply to you.

Block 1: Family Attitudes/Family Support

Support from your family, particularly your spouse, is essential to success as an adult student. Unfortunately, sometimes families are not supportive, and returning students often have to overcome negative family attitudes. Children and spouses may feel neglected and envious of the time you spend in school. They may intentionally interrupt you when you study or try to convince you to drop out of school.

The best way to address this problem is through honest and constructive conversation. Talk with your family members about why you want to succeed in school. Listen to them and try to understand their concerns. If your spouse is threatened by your being in school, try reassuring him or her. Find out whether your being in school is really causing your family members any hardships. Try making a deal with them where they give you time for school and time to study in return for something that they want.

Overcoming the block of family attitudes results in family support. Studies show that family support is one of the most important keys to success in school. If you approach them properly, your family members should eventually become proud and supportive of your decision to return to school.

❒ **What is your family's attitude toward your return to the classroom?**

❒ **Are any of your family members a block to your learning?**

❒ **Can you talk with them?**

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Block 2: Time Constraints

No other block to learning is mentioned more often by adults returning to school than insufficient time. This is understandable. Many adult students work full-time and have families. Managing your time well is the only way to deal with these responsibilities and to find time for reading and studying too.

When you manage your time well, you turn this block into a strength. Students who manage their time well have a big advantage over other students. They get more done, more quickly, and do a better job of handling the stress of school. Additional information in this section will give you specific guidelines and suggestions for improving your time management skills.

- ❒ **Think about the things in your life that currently make the most demands on your time. List them below.**

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It is important to be aware of where your time goes. Being aware is the first step in becoming a good time manager.

Block 3: Inability to See "Big Picture"

Have you ever studied hard for a test, memorized lots of facts, and then bombed out when the questions on the exam took you by surprise?

Studies show that many students don't do well in school because they forget about the big picture. They tend to focus too much on details, memorizing facts or obscure theories, forgetting their goals, and setting aside their common sense.

Seeing the big picture means seeing how the facts you are studying relate to your personal goals and the larger goals of the class. Seeing the big picture helps you make decisions about which details are important and which are not. It helps you decide what to read carefully and what to skim over, what to memorize and what to forget. A student who has the big picture in mind learns more while studying less.

Block 4: Avoidance Tactics

Below are some of the tactics people may use in avoiding doing the work that returning to school requires. Many of these relate to attitudes and study habits. Developing a "Can Do" attitude will turn this block into a strength.

- **"I can't do it."**

  The only way people know that they cannot do so something is by first trying. Don't give up before you make a real effort. You'd be surprised how much you can do!

- **"I'm too busy."**

  Don't use time as an excuse for not doing school work. Good students manage their time and don't let personal or family problems get in the way of their goals.

- **"I'll do it later."**

  Everyone tends to procrastinate at times. Putting off homework and studying can put you in a real bind. A much better approach is "Do it now!"

- **"I'm bored with this subject."**

  Sometimes students explain that they are doing poorly in a course because the instructor or the subject matter is boring. Successful students have a knack for finding something interesting about most subjects.

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What Are My Strengths and Weaknesses as a Student?

Take a few minutes and think about your own strengths and weaknesses and the barriers you may have to overcome as a returning student. Think about your personal coping skills, your accomplishments, your habits, your work skills and your past education. Think about those who are supporting you or standing in your way: your family, your job, and other aspects of your life that relate to your success at school. In the left column, list your strengths: things that will work for you as a student. In the right column, list the weaknesses or blocks that you need to overcome.

Strengths	Weaknesses
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
4.	4.
5.	5.

Time Management and Organization

Managing your time and staying organized are the best ways of making sure you succeed in school. The following suggestions are designed to help you use time well and keep on top of your commitments as a student.

- **Keep a large monthly calendar.**

  A calendar is your first method of time control. It allows you, in one quick glance, to get a clear picture of what you need to do in weeks to come. Hang the calendar in a place where you will see it every day. On the following page, you will find a sample page from a blank monthly calendar.

- **Keep a daily "to do" list.**

  Keep a "to do" list every day. A "to do" list is a simple list of things you want to accomplish during the day. Keep this list with you during the day. Cross out items when you complete them; add new items when you think of them. The advantage of keeping a daily list is that you don't have to rely on your memory to remember what to do next. It's on the list.

- **Be prepared to be a student at any time.**

  Use odd hours during the day for study. Anticipate when and where you could be forced to wait. Carry notes and textbooks with you. While you're waiting to pick up your child at soccer practice, while you're waiting in the dentist's office–wherever you happen to be during your busy day–whenever there are five minutes–be a student. Five minute blocks can't replace concentrated study time, but they do add up.

❒ **Where will you hang you calendar so that you will see it everyday?**

❒ **Where can you find extra time for reading or studying? List below.**

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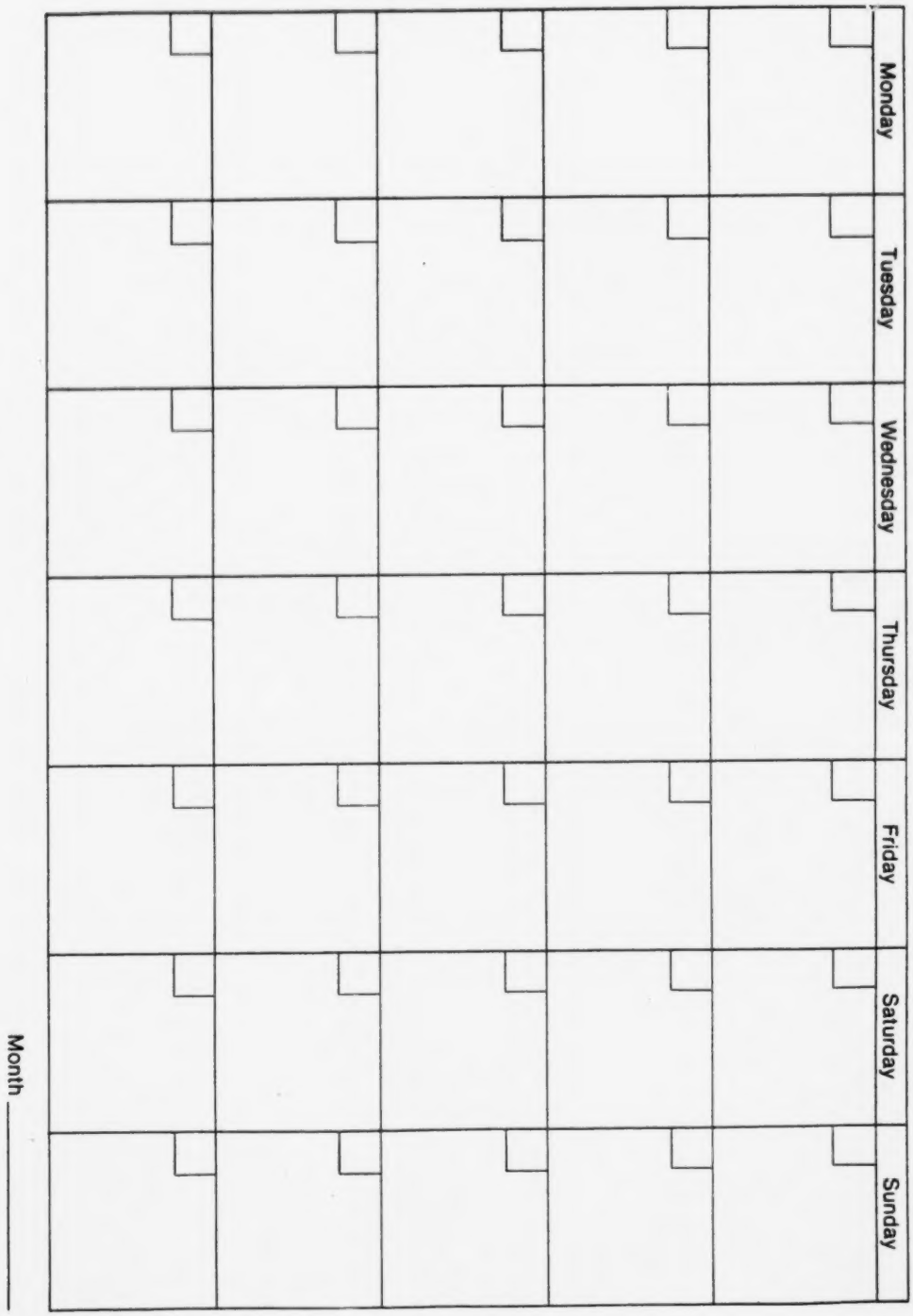
Sample Monthly Calendar



Ten Tips for Successful Students

1. **Make and keep a study schedule.**

   Plan to spend an hour to two hours studying for each hour spent in class. Plan time for reading, writing, library study, and review.

2. **Study in a suitable place–the same each day.**

   Experts tell us that the right surrounding will help you to concentrate. Study in a quiet place–as free from distractions as possible. You will concentrate better if you study in the same place everyday, and you will spend less time getting settled down to work.

3. **Collect all the materials you'll need before you begin.**

   Your study desk or table should have everything you need for studying: paper, pens, dictionary, books, notes and anything else you need. Get in the habit of studying without interruption.

4. **Complete your most important task first.**

   Complete your most important task or assignment before moving to the next one, and give it your total attention. If you don't have the time to do it right, when will you have the time to do it over?

5. **Maintain a well-kept notebook.**

   Students with more organized notebooks get better grades. Keeping notes and dates in order will help you find things when you need them and make your studying much easier.

6. **Keep careful record of your assignments.**

   Write down all assignments either on a notepad, daily schedule, calendar or all three. Keep all assignments together and check them off when completed.

7. **Use "trade secrets" for successful study.**

   Flash cards are magic helpers. On the front of a small card write an important term in history, biology, English, etc. On the back write the definition or an important fact about that term. Carry your flash cards with you. At odd times, take them out and quiz yourself.

   The **divided page** is another trick of the study trade. Make a dividing line down the center of a sheet of notebook paper. Then write important questions on the left side and answers on the right. Use the "self-recitation" method of study. Cover the right-hand side and try to give the answer. Then check and recheck until you're sure you know the material.

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Cover cards are another simple but effective study device. As you are study, look at your textbook or notebook and read what you are trying to memorize. Then use your "cover card" to conceal what you have just read, and try reciting or writing the facts from memory. Keep trying until you are sure you have mastered those facts.

8. **Overlearn to remember what you've studied.**

   Psychologists tell us that the secret to learning is overlearning. Overlearning is continuing your study after you have learned the material only well enough to barely recall it.

9. **Sit close to your instructor.**

   Did you know that students who sit close to their instructors often get better grades? There may be several reasons for this: there are fewer distractions and a person is less likely to daydream or read something else under the professor's nose. The closer you sit to the front, the fewer interesting heads there are between you and the instructor. Material on the board is also easier to read.

10. **Concentrate when you study.**

    If you find yourself daydreaming while reading, stop, get up, and face away from your book. This helps clear your head for better concentration. If you find yourself daydreaming in class, make a conscious effort to bring yourself back to the class.

❒ **What other suggestions would you offer to fellow students?**

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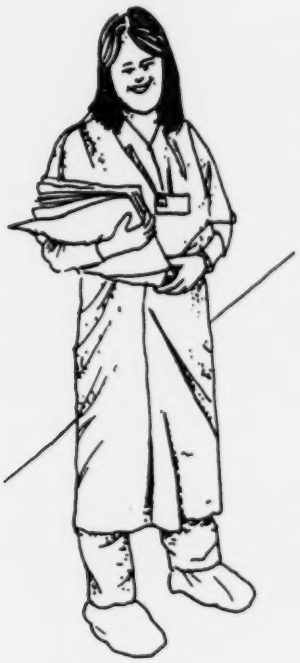

Starting Off on the Right Foot

It's important to get off to a good start right at the beginning of the semester. If you are prepared and organized on the first day, you can make a good impression on the teacher and set a positive tone for the rest of the semester.

❒ **How should you prepare yourself for the first day of class?**

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Additional Suggestions for Starting Off Well

Here are some additional tips for starting the semester.

- **Locate your classroom prior to the first class meeting.**
  Don't wait until the first day of class to try and find your classroom. Things often get hectic that first day and you should try to avoid any last-minute hassles.

- **Be prepared for the first class.**
  The first meeting of class is crucial. Bring two pens and a notebook with you. Many teachers not only distribute basic information about assigned textbooks and requirements, but they also start lecturing the first day.

- **Buy books early.**
  Don't put off getting your books, even if you have to wait in a long, boring line at the bookstore. You will need the books right away if you don't want to fall behind.

- **Find out the names and phone numbers of the students in class.**
  Exchange names and phone numbers with some students in the class early in the semester. If you miss class, contact them for notes and assignments. Teachers are impressed by students who take responsibility for themselves in that way. On the other hand, it makes a negative impression when students say, "I don't have the assignment because I was absent" or "Could you tell me what I missed?"
  You may also want to get together with some of the students in class for study sessions or group assignments. Having their names and numbers handy may save you some time when you need to get in touch with them.

- **Decide how much work you can handle.**
  Decide right from the start how much work you can handle. If you are taking five courses, working a full-time job, and caring for two children, you're asking for a nervous breakdown–no matter how organized you are.

Relationships with Instructors

It is important to develop a good working relationships with your instructors. Consider the following suggestions when dealing with your teachers.

- **Avoid excuses.**
  Instructors know them all. Most teachers can see a snow job coming before you finish thinking it up. Be honest. Accept responsibility for mistakes and failures, and don't con yourself into thinking you can fool your professor.

- **Submit professional work of high quality in both content and form.**
  Prepare papers as if you were submitting them to an employer. Imagine that a promotion and raise will be determined by your work.

- **Form your own opinion about each instructor.**
  Students talk about teachers and you may hear conflicting reports. Decide for yourself.

- **Get to know your teacher.**
  Get to know your teachers first-hand. Take advantage of their office hours. Some teachers best express their love and enthusiasm for their subject in private conversations rather than lectures.

- **Be attentive in class.**
  Daydreaming, sleeping, or having side conversations will insult your instructor. Besides, you miss what's happening in class.

- **Participate in class discussion.**
  Ask questions. Provide answers. Be ready to debate and discuss. Your instructor will know you are interested and prepared. Asking questions to sidetrack your teacher or just to get noticed, however, wastes everyone's time.

- **Accept criticism.**
  Learn from your teacher's comments on your work. It is a teacher's job to make comments and correct. Don't take criticism personally.

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Setting Up Conferences

A conference with your teacher may be necessary at some time while you are in school. Difficulties can arise over grades, attendance policies, lecture styles, term papers, or personality conflicts. Here are some tips on handling such a conference.

- **Set up a meeting.**
  Don't try to solve a serious problem in the few minutes before or after class. The instructor might feel uncomfortable or may not think it is appropriate to handle the problem in front of other students.

- **Be open, rather then critical of the instructor.**
  Don't challenge the instructor's fairness or judgment. Instead, use "I" messages to express your feelings and concerns. Consider "I worked hard on this paper and feel disappointed about my grade. Can you tell me how I could have improved it?" If you seem more concerned about *learning* than about *grades*, the teacher will have more respect for you.

- **Listen without judgment to your instructor's comments.**
  Discuss issues openly and be assertive. Ask for what you want. But also be willing to listen to what the instructor has to say.

The most important thing to remember is that instructors are people too. The most successful conferences will always be the result of rational, reasonable people working together to solve a problem.

❒ **What are some of your concerns about dealing with instructors?**

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Becoming a Better Reader

Reading is one of the more complex and most important activities that we commonly engage in. We read for a lot of reasons: for fun, to learn new information, to learn how to do things, to keep informed. Students in school primarily read to learn how to do things and for new information.

To get the most out of your reading, you need to become an **active reader**. Active readers do more than simply decipher the words on the page. They read aggressively and for their own purposes. They make decisions as they read about the importance and usefulness of information. They skim over information they decide is unimportant, and they give extra concentration to new information and difficult ideas.

Active readers don't simply accept or memorize what they read. They feel free to question or disagree with what a book says. When they are uncomfortable with an idea in a book, they ask themselves why and try to discover the weakness in the author's argument.

An example: Toni is reviewing the textbook of her medical technology course in preparation for a certification exam. She flips through the pages, spending only a few seconds on most pages, reminding herself of key ideas and rereading notes she has made in the margins of the book. When she gets to a page she doesn't remember well, she takes a little longer, rereads the page and adds a few new notes in the margins. She comes to a section on legal liability and decides to skim over it because she remembers the instructor saying that legal material will not be on the exam.

Becoming a Better Reader is designed to help you evaluate your reading abilities, build upon them, and make yourself a more active reader. In most college courses, you will be responsible for reading and understanding a wide range of information. More than this, you will need to be able to analyze new information, criticize it, and apply it to new situations. Active reading is the key to these tasks.

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What is Active Reading?

Active reading is effective reading. The active reader:

- Reads with a purpose.
- Adjusts reading style to material.
- Recognizes the main ideas the author presents.
- Focuses on important facts; skims over less important material quickly to save time.
- Tries to understand the sequence and organization of the ideas presented.
- Questions and argues with the text.
- Predicts what's coming.
- Evaluates the reliability and authority of the author.
- Recognizes the author's point of view, intentions, and style.

❒ **Are you an active reader? How would you describe your own reading style?**

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SQ3R: A Method for Active Reading

SQ3R is a proven technique for active reading. It is designed to make your reading more effective and more efficient.

SQ3R = Survey–Question–Read–Recite–Review

Survey Before you start reading, skim or survey the material. Look over a chapter for a few minutes before studying it in depth.

- Read the title first to get an idea of what the material is about.
- Look at headings and subheadings. They can help you get an overall picture of the author's plan.
- Look at charts, pictures, graphs, and other illustrations. Read the captions under each.
- Quickly scan introductory paragraphs, and summary sections. They can give you a sense of the big picture.

Question Think up questions that you would like the book section or chapter to answer before you start reading.

- What is this article or chapter about? What is the main theme? How does this material relate to the course subject?
- Turn the headings and subheadings into questions that you would expect the section to answer.
- Ask yourself whether you know the answer to these questions when you finish reading the section.

Read Read the material.

- Read the introductory paragraphs carefully.
- Read only the material covered under one heading or subheading at a time, looking for the answers to your questions.
- Read ideas, not just words.
- Spend more time with material that seems more important and go quickly through material that seems less important.
- Keep asking yourself "What is the author's main purpose in writing this material?"
- Read aggressively, with the intent of getting answers, of noting supporting details, and of remembering.

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Recite Tell yourself or someone else what you just read.

- Summarize for yourself what you've just read: "OK, when you're dealing with a diabetic patient, the most important things to remember are a, b, and c."
- Students who spend 25% of their time reading and 75% reciting remember much more than students who spend all their time reading.

Review Review the material.

- Look over the material one last time and get an overall view of the main points.
- Recall subpoints under each main point.
- Write down key information you feel you must remember on a separate sheet of paper or study cards.

Success with SQ3R

SQ3R may seem difficult at first, but it's really a common-sense approach to active reading. When you have used SQ3R a few times, it becomes easy to do; and after a while, it becomes a habit that you don't even have to think about.

What results can you expect if you read or study by using SQ3R?

- You will learn to pick out the important points quickly.
- You will understand difficult material better.
- You will be able to remember more of the material longer.
- You will be able to predict questions for quizzes and exams.
- You can review your notes quickly and easily without going back to the text.

More Techniques for Active Readers

Here are some additional techniques that will help you become an active reader.

- Mark the text.
- Comment in the margin.
- Assess your understanding.
- Distill key points.

Mark the Text

Marking the text helps you focus on key information while you are reading and helps remind you of what is important when you review. You should look for and mark important ideas and details. Marking means that you underline, check, star, number or otherwise signal important points in a selection. A good idea is to read to the end of a paragraph or section before you begin marking so that you get the whole picture before focusing on specifics. Then go back and mark important material.

Marking should be an *active* process, reflecting your decisions about what is significant material. It should also be a *selective* process. Some students are so impressed by all the markings they enter in their textbooks that they fool themselves into thinking they've done the hard work needed to put the material together. Underlining the whole text, for example, is pointless. Marking too much material is probably worse than marking too little. The idea is to mark your text in a way that will help you in your future reviews.

The following important kinds of material are often good to mark:

- Definitions and examples
- Items in a list
- Headings and subheadings and relationships between them
- Main ideas in paragraphs and short selections

Comment in the Margin

Use the margin as a place to help draw your attention back to key points. You may use symbols such as asterisks, arrows, etc. to point at key terms. You may also want to write key terms in the margin. If the author is developing several points, number them in the margins.

You may also want to use the margins for questions or comments or to disagree or agree with the author. Carry on a conversation with the author. If you don't understand something you're reading, make a comment in the margin. Think while you read, and note some of your thoughts in the margins.

If you are reading material that you know you will want to review again–for an exam or for some paper you are writing–the clues in the margins can help you greatly in speeding up the review process.

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More Techniques for Active Readers

This page is the same page you have just read. But it has been marked and has comments written on it. What do you think of them?

Here are some additional techniques that will help you become an active reader.

- Mark the text.
- Comment in the margin.
- Assess your understanding.
- Distill key points.

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Assess Your Understanding

Stop in the middle of a reading assignment, especially when the writer is moving from one important point to another, and assess what you have already learned. Think about what you have read, and make sure that you understand what you have read.

Learn to pay attention to the signals writers provide to help you through a reading. For example, in the middle or end of a reading, the writer will often provide a new heading, some extra white space, or an obvious transitional sentence signalling a shift from one idea to another. This is where you want to stop, review, and reflect on what you have just read. Try telling yourself out loud what you have just read.

Distill Key Points

Perhaps the important phase of reading comes after you read a text. We forget almost everything we read rapidly unless we make an effort to remember.

Therefore, after completing a reading assignment, brainstorm a list of its important points. Determine which points are most important, and in your own words, use them to write a two-or three-sentence summary of the entire assignment.

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When the Reading Gets Tough

Sometimes SQ3R and other reading strategies are just not enough. Textbooks, particularly those dealing with technical or scientific areas, often contain information that is hard to read and understand. Try using the following techniques when the reading gets really tough.

- **Read it again.**

  Rereading is not always a waste of time. Don't give up if the material doesn't seem clear the first time around. Get up, move around, or take a break, and come back to the material later on. When you return to the reading, you will see the material with fresh eyes.

- **Look for essential words.**

  If you are stuck on a paragraph, mentally cross out the less important words and focus on the key words. Find the important words–usually nouns and verbs.

- **Hold a mini-review.**

  Stop at the end of each paragraph and recite or write, in your own words, what you have just read.

- **Read it aloud.**

  Make some noise. This slows you down, but speed isn't everything. Read a passage aloud several times, each time emphasizing a different part of the sentence.

- **Use your instructor.**

  Admit when you are stuck, and make an appointment with your instructor. Be specific about your confusion. Point out the paragraph or pages that you found toughest to understand.

- **Find a tutor.**

  Many schools provide free tutoring services. Tutors can give you a new perspective on a problem you may be having with certain material. If tutoring services are not available, try to find other students who have completed the course, and ask for some help.

- **Use an alternative text.**

  Find an alternative text in the library. Sometimes the same concept can be understood better if you have it expressed another way.

- **Change positions.**

  Changing reading positions can combat fatigue. Try standing, reading in a different position, or walking around if you get stuck on a tough passage. Sometimes pacing back and forth can help to focus concentration.

Active Reading Techniques
I Want to Remember

We've given you several techniques to help you become an active reader. Think back on these, and list below the ones you think will benefit you most.

-
-
-
-
-

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Improving Your Listening Skills and Learning to Take Effective Classroom Notes

One of the most important skills for becoming a successful student is the ability to listen well in class and to take effective classroom notes. Many exam questions come directly from classroom lectures. Sometimes, however, you may feel bombarded by the large amount of information given during class. You may not know how to decide what is important information and what is not.

Here are some questions you may want to consider.

- How can I become an effective listener in class?
- How can I prepare myself to take better notes?
- How can I decide which information from lecture is most important?
- How can I decide which information from lecture is least important?
- How can I keep up with the material being discussed?

Listening Skills

We all think we can listen, but the question is "How good a listener are you?" In fact, just exactly what do we mean by "listening"? Here are some interesting facts about listening.

- **Listening is our primary communication activity.**

  Studies show that we spend about 80% of our waking hours communicating. According to research, at least 45% of that time is spent listening. In education, listening has often been cited as being the most critical learning, growth, and development tool.

- **Listening is more than just hearing.**

  Hearing is only the first part of listening–the physical part when the ears sense sound waves. There are three other equally important parts:

  1. **Interpretation** of what was heard. Interpretation leads to understanding and/or misunderstanding.
  2. **Evaluation** of information. Evaluation is your weighing the information and deciding how to use it.
  3. **Reaction** to what you heard and to your own evaluation.

- **Most of us are inefficient listeners.**

  Tests have shown that immediately after listening to a 10 minute oral presentation, the average listener has heard, understood, evaluated, and retained only half of what was said. Within 48 hours, that drops off to 25%. In other words, we often comprehend and retain only 1/4 of what is said.

- **Our listening habits are not the result of training but rather the result of the lack of it.**

  The chart below shows the order in which the four basic communication skills are learned, the degree to which they are used, and the extent to which they are taught. Listening, as you will see, is the communication skill used *most* but taught *least*.

	Listening	Speaking	Reading	Writing
Learned	First	Second	Third	Fourth
Used	Most (45%)	30%	16%	Least 9%
Taught	Least	Next Least	Next Most	Most

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Keys to Effective Listening

These keys are a positive guideline to better listening. They are at the heart of developing better listening habits that can last a lifetime.

Effective Listening	Inefficient Listener	Efficient Listener
Find areas of interest	Tunes out dry subjects	Looks for meaning
Judge content, not delivery	Tunes out if delivery is poor	Judges content, skips over delivery errors
Listen to ideas	Listens for facts themes	Listens for central
Work at listening	Shows no energy output Attention is faked	Works hard at good body language
Resist distractions	Distracted easily	Fights to avoid distractions
Listen actively	Sits passively while listening	Takes notes

Listening Activity #1–Following Directions

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Listening Activity #2–Listening and Taking Notes

While effective listening may be the single most important skill for note-taking, additional skills are also needed. While you are writing down what the teacher has said, you must also be able to listen to what the teacher is now saying and to decide whether it is important enough to write down as well. If you can listen ahead and process and remember what you hear while you are writing rapidly, you will be listening efficiently. Your brain will be able to work along with and ahead of your pen.

Group A

1.

2.

3.

Group B

1.

2.

3.

Group C

1.

2.

3.

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Hints for Taking Effective Classroom Notes

If you want to do well in a course, you must go to class faithfully and take good notes. This section offers a series of tips on how to take effective classroom notes. Attending class and taking your own notes is the best way to learn. Alternatives to class attendance–reading the text or using someone else's notes–are a poor substitute for being in class and hearing the instructor talk about key ideas in the course.

- **Keep a written record.**

  Get down a written record for each class. It's important that you write down the material covered because forgetting begins almost immediately. How many notes should you take? If you pay attention in class, you will soon develop an instinct for what is meaningful and what is not.

- **Sit where you will be seen.**

  Sit where the teacher will always see you, preferably toward the front of the room. Your position will help you stay tuned to what the instructor does in class. This will also help you stay alert and take notes.

- **Do some advance reading.**

  Read in advance about the topic to be discussed in class. All too often, students don't read assigned textbook material on a topic until after class is over. Lacking the necessary background, they have trouble understanding the new ideas discussed in class. However, if you have made an initial breakthrough on a topic by doing advance reading, you will be able to listen and take notes more easily and with greater understanding.

- **Record notes systematically.**

  1. Use full-sized 8 1/2 by 11 inch paper. You may need the margin and are more likely to see groups or related ideas on a full page.
  2. Keep all notes from each course together in separate sections of a notebook.
  3. Date each day's notes.
  4. Use notebook paper that has a red line down the left side of the paper. Take notes on the right side of the page and leave space at the top of the page. Having good margins gives you space to add to your notes.
  5. Write legibly. When you prepare for a test, you want to spend your time studying–not deciphering your handwriting.

6. Abbreviate recurring terms to save time. Put a key for abbreviated words in the top margin of your notes. Also abbreviate the following common words, using the symbols below:

+	=	and	def	=	definition
w/	=	with	eg	=	for example
info	=	information	ex	=	example
1, 2, 3	=	one, two, three, etc.	∴	=	therefore

7. Note the dates of exams, quizzes, and assignments. It's a good idea to circle exam dates and put a large *A* for assignment in the margin.

- **Be alert for signals.**

  Watch for signals of importance:

  1. Write down whatever your teacher puts on the board. Put the letters *OB* in the margin to indicate that the material was written on the board.
  2. Write down definitions and numbered lists. Numbered lists are signaled in such ways as "The four steps in a process are . . . "
  3. Write down important statements. Put *IMP* or some other mark to show their importance. Important statements are signaled in such ways as "This is an important reason. . . " or "The chief cause was . . ."
  4. If your teacher repeats a point, you can usually assume it is important. You may write *R* for repeated in the margin so that you will know later that your instructor stressed that idea.

- **Write down examples.**

  Write down any examples the teacher provides and mark them with *ex*. If you don't mark them with an *ex*, you are likely to forget their purpose when you review.

- **Write down details that connect or explain.**

  Be sure to write down the details that connect or explain main points. That way you are more apt to remember the relationship among the major points in your notes. Teachers often make connections at the beginning or end of a class. They may review material already covered and preview what is to come. You may want to label this material review or preview.

- **Leave some blank spaces.**

  Leave blank spaces for items or ideas you miss. Right after class, ask another student or teacher to help you fill in the gaps. If you fall behind in your note-taking, concentrate on getting down what seem to be the main ideas rather than the supporting facts and details.

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- **Ask questions.**

  Don't hesitate to ask the instructor questions if certain points are confusing to you. Other students are likely to have the same questions. Remember teachers look favorably upon students who show interest and curiosity.

- **Take notes during discussion.**

  Do not stop taking notes during discussion periods. Many valuable ideas may come up during informal discussions–ideas that your instructor may not present formally later on.

- **Take notes right up to the end of class.**

  Do not stop taking notes toward the end of class. Because of time spent on discussions, teachers may have to cram important points they want to cover into the last minutes of class. Be prepared to resist the fatigue that may settle in during class.

- **Review your notes soon after class.**

  Go over your notes soon after class. While they are still clear in your mind, make your notes as clear as possible. A day later may be too late because forgetting sets in almost at once.

❒ **What do you consider the five most important hints? List them below.**

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Improving Test-Taking Abilities

Of all the activities associated with returning to school, taking tests produces the most anxiety for the adult student. A familiar complaint is, "I'm always afraid I'll panic during an exam. I know a lot of the material, but when I sit down and start looking at the questions, I forget the things I know."

It is a fact of life that the majority of students are concerned about grades. Everyone wants to do well, and to most students being successful means making good grades. Making good grades often depends on doing well on tests.

If you have applied yourself during the term, preparing for exams becomes largely a question of reviewing what you have done before. The time needed is not as extensive as you might think, provided that you have been working throughout the term. I f you are well-prepared, you are not likely to block or panic on exams. This means you must go to class consistently, read the textbook and any other material, take class notes and textbook notes, and study your notes.

This section gives you suggestions for preparing for classroom tests. General preparation guidelines are discussed and specific ideas are given for taking both objective and essay exams.

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Preparing for Exams

A key to successful test preparation is managing review time. Here are some general principles useful in preparing for an exam, no matter if it is an essay or an objective type.

General Test Preparation Guidelines

- **Practice continuous reading and review.**

  If you keep up with the reading, keep good notes that you review occasionally, and spend time reflecting on the meaning of what you are studying, you are preparing for an exam.

- **Maintain a daily review schedule.**

  Daily reviews include the short pre-and post-class reviews of lecture notes. You can also conduct brief daily reviews when you read. Before you begin a new reading assignment, scan your notes and the sections you underlined in the previous assignment.

  Concentrate daily reviews on two kinds of material: material you have just learned, and material that involves simple memorization.

- **Practice systematic reviews a week or so prior to an exam.**

  A systematic review a week or so prior to an examination can be most helpful. This is not the same as cramming, in which you try to do several weeks worth of reading an study in a few concentrated hours. Systematic review includes going over lecture notes and, if possible, meeting with other students to discuss what you are learning.

- **Do not alter your regular life schedule.**

  Some students cram all night prior to an exam by keeping awake with coffee or something stronger. A regular schedule of eating, sleeping, recreation, etc. should help you to be mentally alert for an exam and will usually be more beneficial to you than extended hours of studying prior to an exam.

- **Make study checklists.**

  Write a checklist of the material you want to study. List reading assignments by chapters or page number. List dates of lecture notes. Write down other skills you want to master. Include major idea, definition, theories, formulas, equations, and other information you might need. Use the written checklist to be certain that you don't forget to study a certain section.

  But remember, study checklists are not review sheets. They contain the briefest possible description of each item.

- **Keep, correct, and review returned quizzes and exams.**

  Check with your instructor if you are uncertain about the correct answer he or she expects.

- **Study your instructor's "test technique."**
  After you have taken some exams from an instructor, you get an idea of what types of questions he or she asks.
- **Study and practice on questions.**
  Look in your textbook, workbook, previous exams, and other sources also available to your instructor.
- **Ask your instructor what kinds of questions will be on the test.**
  Finding out beforehand relieves some anxiety and lets you know what to expect on the test.
- **Ask the instructor what material will be covered on an examination.**
  Ask what will be covered–textbook assignments, class lecture, outside readings, movies, laboratory experiments, etc.
- **Take 5-10 minute rest periods every hour.**
  To minimize fatigue, break intensive study sessions with 5-10 minute rest periods every hour.
- **Review with study groups.**
  Review likely test questions with other students is small study groups of two to four members after each has first studied independently.
- **Complete long-term projects in advance.**
  Complete long-term assignments ahead of scheduled exams so that your time will be free for intensive reviewing.
- **Study differently for objective vs essay tests.**
  Concentrate on remembering specific details (who, when where) when studying for an objective test; concentrate on understanding broad concepts (what, why, how) when studying for an essay exam.

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Ten Test Taking Tips

The following suggestions will help you make the most of your time before a test.

- **Study right before you sleep. Get a good night's sleep.**
  Spend the night before an exam making a final review of your notes. Then go right to bed without watching television or otherwise interfering with the material you have learned. You mind will tend to work through and absorb the material during the night. To further lock in your learning, get up a half an hour earlier than usual the next morning and review your notes.
- **Take materials needed to the exam.**
  Make sure you take with you any materials (pens, paper, eraser, calculator, dictionary, and other aids allowed) you will need during the exam.
- **Arrive early for the exam.**
  Allow yourself plenty of time to relax and get organized. If you arrive late, you are setting yourself up to do poorly.
- **Sit in a quiet spot.**
  Some people are very talkative and noisy before an exam. Since you don't want anything to interfere with your learning, you are better off not talking with others during the few minutes before the exam starts. In fact, you may want to use those minutes to make one final review of your notes.
- **Read all directions carefully.**
  Read over carefully all the directions on the exam before you begin. Many students don't take this important step and end up losing points because they fail to do what it required. Make sure you understand how you are expected to respond to each item, how many points each section is worth, and equally important, how many questions you must answer. Also listen carefully to any oral directions or hints the instructor may give.

- **Budget your time.**

  Before you begin, take a few seconds to figure out roughly how much time you can spend on each section of the test. Write the number of minutes in the margin of your exam paper or on a scratch sheet. Then stick to that schedule. Be sure to have a watch or to sit where you can see a clock.

  Exactly how you budget your time depends on what kinds of questions you are good at answering and the point value of different sections of the test. Keep in mind that the reason for budgeting your time is to prevent you from ending up with ten minutes left and a 50 point essay still to write or 30 multiple-choice questions to answer.

- **Read each question carefully and completely before marking or writing your answer.**

  Reread the question if you are confused. If you still don't understand the question, move on to the next and come back to it later.

- **Ask the instructor if you find a question unclear.**

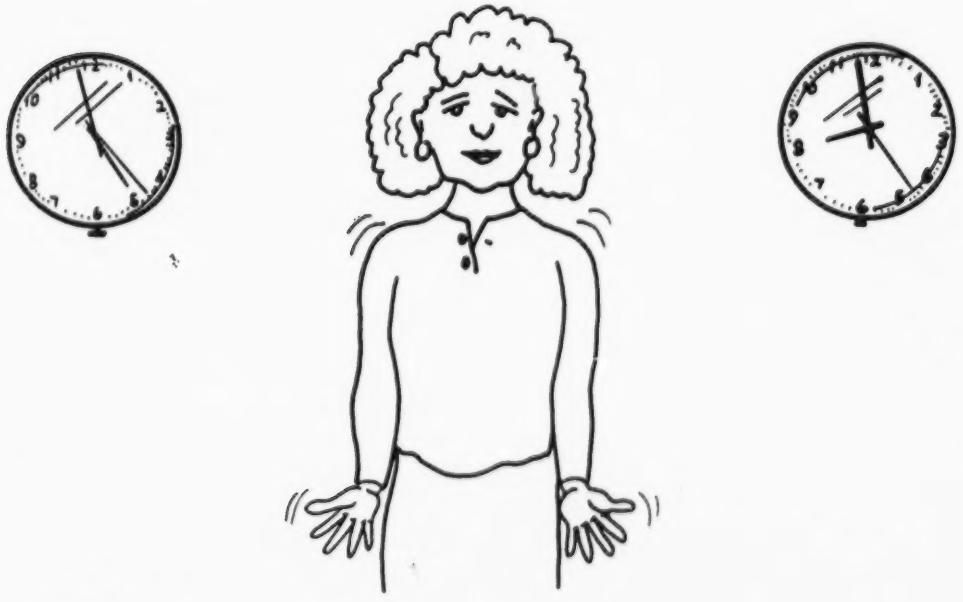
  Others may also need help on that question and he or she will make it clear for everyone.

- **Don't panic if you have a lapse of memory.**

  This is normal. Leave the questions that bothers you for a while and return to it later.

- **Don't worry about other students who finish the test early.**

  Take your time. Use any left over time to check or proofread your answers.



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Taking Objective Exams

Objective tests may include multiple-choice, true-false, fill-in, and matching questions. To do well on objective tests, you must know how to read items carefully. The following list describes some strategies you can use to deal with the special problems poses by objective tests.

- **Answer all the easier questions first.**

  Don't lose valuable time stalling over hard questions. Instead, put a light check mark beside difficult questions and continue working through the entire test, answering all the questions you can do right away.

- **Do difficult questions in time remaining.**

  Go back and spend the time remaining with the difficult questions you have marked. Often you will find that while you are answering the easier questions, your unconscious has been working on questions you at first found difficult.

- **Answer all questions.**

  Guess if you must. By doing so, you are bound to pick up at least a few points.

- **For difficult questions, think of the instructor's view.**

  Put yourself in the instructor's shoes when you are trying to figure out the meaning of a confusing item. In light of what was covered in the course, which answer do you think the instructor would say is correct?

- **Mark key words in difficult questions.**

  This strategy can help you untangle complicated questions and focus on the central point in the item.

- **State difficult questions in your own words.**

  Rephrasing the item in simpler terms and then writing it down or even saying it to yourself can help you cut through the confusion and get to the core of the question. Be sure, however, not to change the original meaning of the item.

- **Use all the time given.**

  Take advantage of the full time given and go over the exam carefully for possible mistakes. People used to say that it is not a good idea to change the first answer you put down. However, as long as you have a good reason, you should change your earlier answers if they seem incorrect. At the same time, be on guard for any last-minute anxiety that prompts you to change an original answer without a good reason.

Specific Hints for Answering Multiple-Choice Questions

1. Remember that a perfect answer to every question may not be provided in multiple-choice exams. You must choose the best answer available.
2. Cross out answers you know are incorrect. Eliminating answers is helpful because it focuses your attention on the most reasonable options. If you think all the options are incorrect, the correct answer is "none of the above."
3. Be sure to read all the possible answers to a questions, especially when the first answer is correct. Remember that the other options could also be correct. In this case, "all of the above" would be the correct response.
4. Minimize the risk of guessing the answer by doing either of the following:
    a. Read the question and then the first possible answer. Next, read the question again and the second possible answer and so on until you have read the question with each separate answer. Breaking down the items this way will often help you identify the option that most logically answers the questions.
    b. Try not to look at the answers when you return to difficult items. Instead, read the question, supply your own answer, and then look for the option on the test that is closest to your response.
5. Use the following clues, which may signal correct answers, only when you have no idea of the answer and must guess.
    a. The longest answer is often correct.
    b. The most complete answer is often correct.
    c. An answer in the middle, especially one with the most words, is often correct.
    d. If two answers have the opposite meaning, one of them is probably correct.
    e. Answers with qualifiers, such as *generally, probably, most, often, some, sometimes,* and *usually,* are frequently correct.

Specific Hints for Answering True-False Questions

1. Simplify questions with double negatives by crossing out both negatives and then determining the correct answer.
2. Remember that answers with qualifiers such as *generally, probably, most, often, some, sometimes,* and *usually,* are frequently true.
3. Remember that answers with absolute words such as *all, always, everyone, never, no one, nobody, none,* and *only* are usually false.

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Specific Hints for Answering Fill-In Questions

1. Read the questions to yourself so you can actually hear what is being asked. If more than one response comes to mind, write them both lightly in the margin. Then, when you review your answers, choose the answer that feels most right for you.
2. Make sure each answer you provide fits logically and grammatically into its slot in the sentence. For example: An _____ listener is not easily distracted. The correct answer is *effective.* Note that the word *an* signals that the correct answer begins with a vowel.
3. Remember that not all fill-in answers require only one word. If you feel that several words are needed to complete an answer, write in all the words unless the instructor or the directions indicate that only single-word responses will be accepted.

Specific Hints for Answering Matching Questions

1. Don't start matching items until you have read both columns and gotten a sense of the alternatives. Often, there's an extra item or two in one column. This means that not all items can be paired. Some of them will be left over.
2. Start, as always, with the easiest items. One by one, focus on each item in one column and look for its match in the other column. Cross out items as you use them.

Taking Essay Exams

Essays exams are designed to measure whether you know the answers to questions, but they also measure your ability to organize and present ideas clearly. Essays tests usually include one or more questions to which you must respond in detail, writing your answers in a clear, well-organized manner. Many students have trouble with essay exams because they do not realize there is a sequence to follow that will help them do well on such tests. Here are five steps you should master if you want to write effective exam essays:

1. **Anticipate probable questions.**

   Because exam time is limited, the instructor can give you only a few questions to answer. He or she will reasonably focus on questions dealing with the most important areas of the subject. You can probably guess most of them.

   Go through your class notes with a colored pen and mark those areas where your instructor has spent a good deal of time. The more time spent on any one area, the better the chance you'll get an essay question on it. In both your class notes and your textbooks, pay special attention to definitions and examples and to basic lists of items. If your instructor has given you study guides, look for probable essay questions there.

2. **Prepare and memorize an informal outline answer for each question.**

   Write out each question you have made up and, under it, list the main points that need to be discussed. Put important supporting information in parentheses after each main point. You now have an informal outline that you can go on to memorize.

   If you have spelling problems, make up a list of words you might have to spell in writing your answers. For example, if you are having a psychology test on the principles of learning, you might want to study such terms as *conditioning, reinforcement, Pavlov, reflex, stimulus,* and so on.

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3. **Look at the exam carefully and do several things.**
   a. Get an overview of the exam by reading all the questions on the test.
   b. Note the direction words, such as compare, illustrate, list, and so on for each question (see page 52). Be sure to write the kind of answer that each question requires.
   c. Budget your time. Write in the margin the number of minutes you should spend on each essay. For example, if you have three essays worth an equal number of points and a one-hour time limit, figure 20 minutes for each one. Make sure you are not left with only a couple of minutes to do a high-point essay.
   d. Start with the easiest question. Getting a good answer down on paper will help build up your confidence and momentum. Number your answers plainly so that you instructor will know know which question you answered first.
4. **Prepare a brief, informal outline before answering an essay question.**
   Use the margin of the exam or a separate sheet of paper to jot down quickly, as they occur to your, the main points you want to discuss in each answer. If there is a question on the exam that is similar to the questions you anticipated and outlined at home, quickly write down words that call back the content of the outline. This step will take only a minute or so, and you will have before you the guide you need to write a focused, supported, organized answer.
5. **Write a clear, well-organized essay.**
   If you have followed the suggestions to this point, you have done all the preliminary work needed to write an effective essay. Don't wreck your chances of getting a good grade by writing carelessly. Instead, as you prepare your response, keep in mind the principles of good writing: unity, support, organization, and clear, error-free sentences.

   First, start your essay with a sentence that clearly states what it will be about. Then make sure that everything in your essay relates to your opening statement.

   Second, though you must obviously take time limitations into account, provide as much support as possible or each of your main points.

   Third, use transitions to guide your reader through your answer. Words such as *first, next, then, however,* and *finally* make it easy for your reader to follow your train of thought.

Last, leave time to proofread your essay for sentence-skills mistakes you may have made while you concentrated on writing your answer.

Key Words Used in Essay Questions

Analyze	Break into parts and discuss, examine, or interpret each part.
Compare	Show similarities between things.
Contrast	Show differences between things.
Criticize	Make judgments. Give the positive and negative points of a subject as well as evidence for these positions.
Define	Explain the exact meaning of a term.
Describe	Tell in detail about something. Make a picture with words. List characteristics, qualities, and parts.
Diagram	Make a drawing and label it.
Discuss	Give the positive and negative points of a subject as well as evidence to support these positions.
Enumerate	List points and number them 1, 2, 3 . . . .
Evaluate	Give the positive and negative points of a subject as well as your judgement about which outweighs the other and why. Include evidence to support these positions. You may want to cite the opinion of an expert.
Illustrate	Explain by giving concrete examples. Explain clearly by giving comparisons or examples.
Interpret	Explain the meaning of something. Comment, give examples, or describe relationships.
Justify	Give reasons for something.
Outline	Give the main points and important secondary points. Put main points at the margin and indent secondary points under the main points. This does not necessarily mean "write a roman numeral/letter outline."
Prove	Show to be true by supporting with facts or reasons (especially facts presented in class or in the text).
Relate	Show connections among things.
State	Explain precisely by giving main points.
Summarize	Give a brief, condensed account of the main points. Include conclusions and avoid unnecessary details.
Trace	Describe the development, progress, or history of a subject or event.

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